

AN AUTUMN LOVE CYCLE

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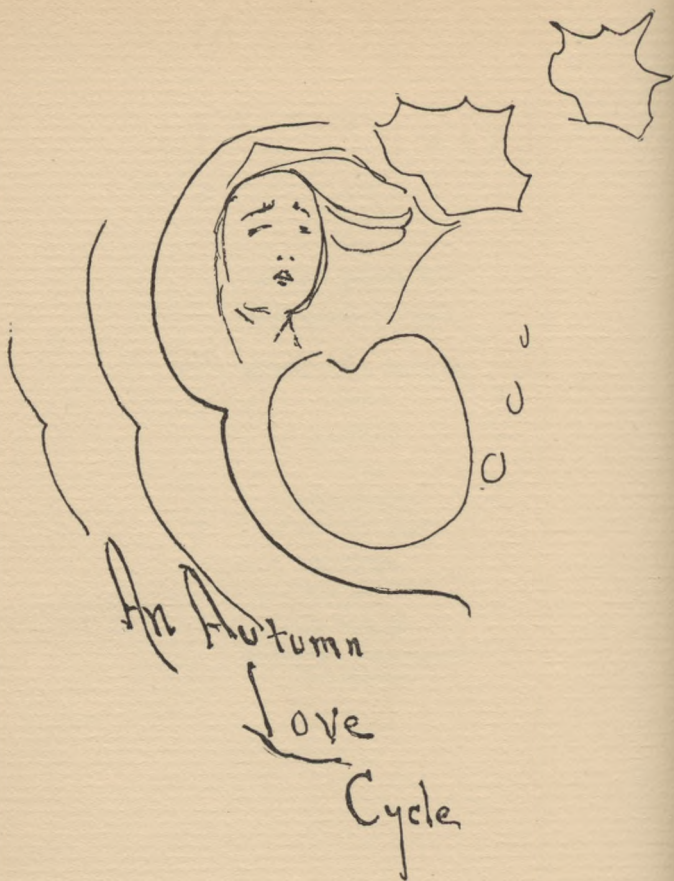
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*From a sketch by*  
EFFIE LEE NEWSHOLME

# AN AUTUMN LOVE CYCLE

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*Georgia Douglas Johnson*

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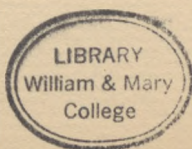
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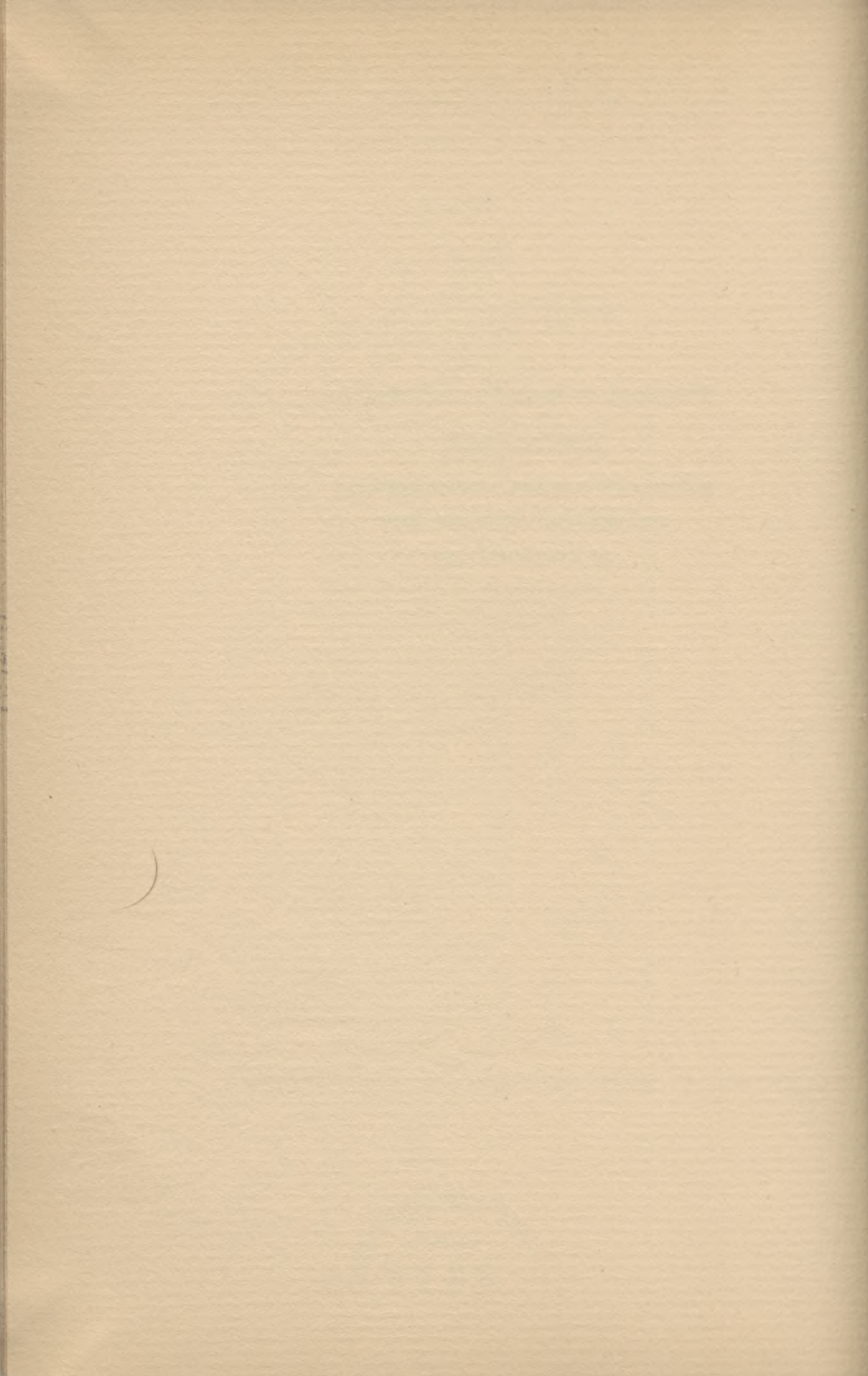


*This book is lovingly dedicated to*

ZONA GALE

*whose appreciation, encouragement  
and helpful criticism have  
so heartened me*

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Acknowledgment is made of the very helpful criticism and suggestions from Alain Locke and Clement Wood in the final preparation of this volume.







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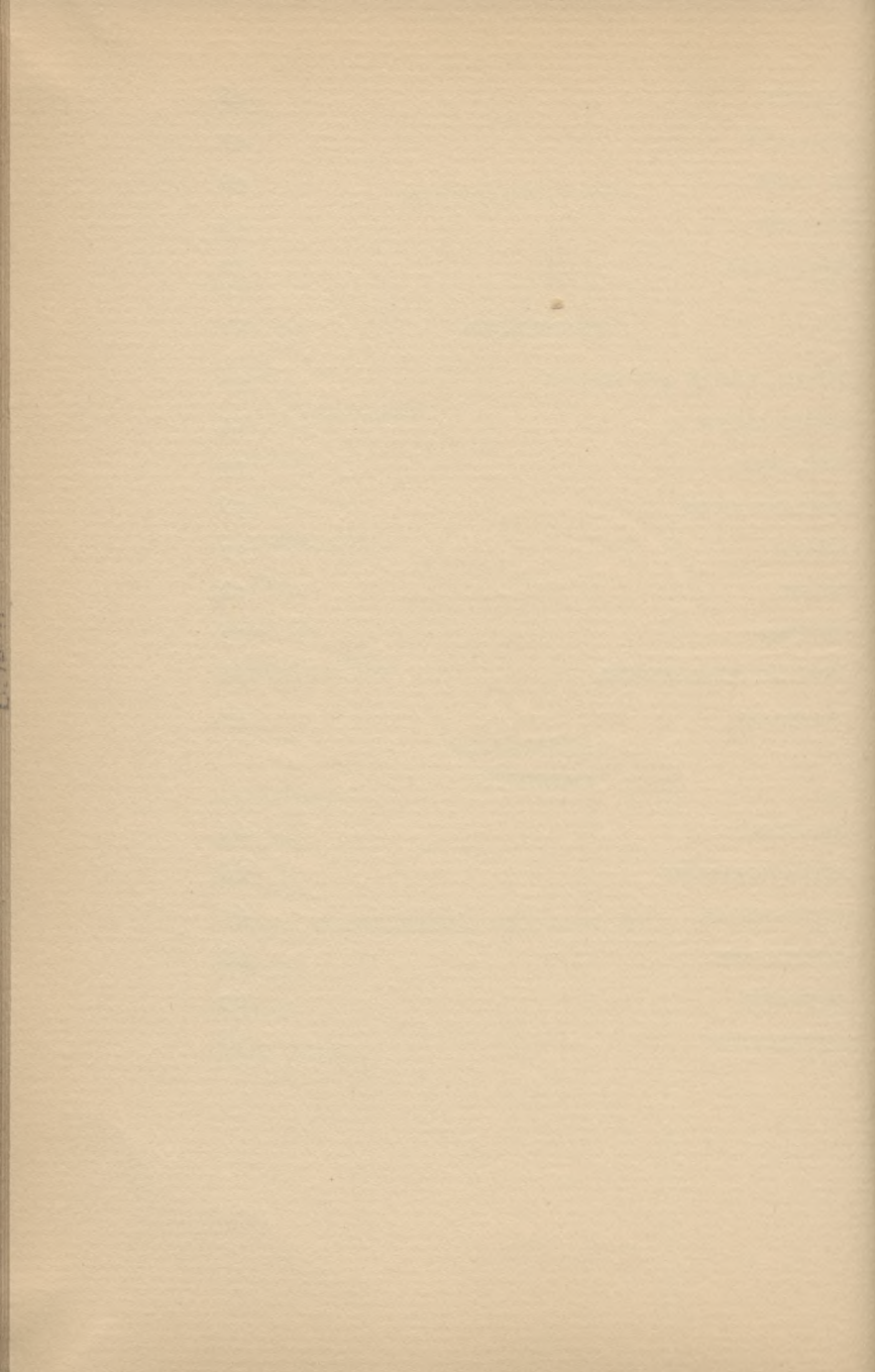
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## FOREWORD

In the title of her first volume, "THE HEART OF A WOMAN and OTHER POEMS," Georgia Douglas Johnson chose with singular felicity, indeed with the felicity of instinct, her special domain in art. And as she proceeds with maturing power and courage of expression in this third volume, it becomes all the more apparent that the task which she has set herself is the documenting of the feminine heart. Any poetic expression of life from this point of view that achieves a genuine authenticity and sincerity of emotion is as welcome as it is rare. For the emotions of woman, time-old though they be and hackneyed over as in a sense they really are, are still but half expressed. They have yet to be carried beyond the platitudes and the sentimentalizations of a man-made tradition. Yet in the wholesome stripping off of mediaeval

brocades and the laces of classic conceits, it has often occurred to us to question whether the imposition of futurist patterns and the cubist cut of the current intellectual modes has given us any more vital or adequate a revelation of the flesh and blood figure of the "eternal feminine." "Clothes are but clothes," as Carlyle would say: modern feminist realism has but overlaid the vitally human with another convention, and interposed another cloak. How long shall we make a sphinx of woman, who herself now yearns to throw off along with the mystery, the psychological vestments of disguise. Our author puts it pointedly in "Paradox,"—

Alas! you love me better cold  
Strange as the pyramids of old  
Responselessly . . .  
So, like a veil, my poor disguise  
Is draped to save me from your eyes'  
Deep challenges.  
Fain would I fling this robe aside  
And from you, in your bosom hide  
Eternally.



Voicing this yearning of woman for candid self-expression, Mrs. Johnson invades the province where convention has been most tyrannous and inveterate,—the experiences of love. And here she succeeds where others more doctrinally feminist than she have failed; for they in oversophistication, in terror of platitudes and the commonplace, have stressed the bizarre, the exceptional, in one way or another have overintellectualized their message and overleapt the common elemental experience they would nevertheless express. Mrs. Johnson, on the contrary, in a simple declarative style, engages with ingenuous directness the moods and emotions of her themes.

Through you I entered Heaven and Hell  
Knew rapture and despair.

Here is the requisite touch, certainly for the experiences of the heart. Greater sophistication would spoil the message. Fortunately, to the gift of a lyric style, delicate in touch, rhapsodic in tone, authentic in timbre, there has been added a temperamental endowment of ardent sincerity

of emotion, ingenuous candor of expression, and, happiest of all for the particular task, a naïve and unsophisticated spirit.

By way of a substantive message, Mrs. Johnson's philosophy of life is simple, unpretentious, but wholesome and spiritually invigorating. On the one hand, she belongs with those who, under the leadership of Sara Teasdale, have been rediscovering the Sapphic cult of love as the ecstasy of life, that cult of enthusiasm which leaps over the dilemma of optimism and pessimism, and accepting the paradoxes, pulses in the immediacies of life and rejoices openly in the glory of experience. In a deeper and somewhat more individual message, upon which she only verges, and which we believe will later be her most mature and original contribution, Mrs. Johnson probes under the experiences of love to the underlying forces of natural instinct which so fatalistically control our lives. [Especially is this evident in her suggestion of the tragic poignancy of Motherhood, where the consummation of love seems also the expiation of passion, and where, between the antagonisms of the dual role of



Mother and Lover, we may suspect the real dilemma of womanhood to lie.]

Whatever the philosophical yield, however, we are grateful for the prospect of such lyricism. Seeking a pure lyric gold, Mrs. Johnson has gone straight to the mine of the heart. She has dug patiently in the veins of her own subjective experience. What she has gleaned has been treasured for the joy of the search and for its own intrinsic worth, and not exploited for the values of show and applause. Above all, her material has been expressed with a candor that shows that she brings to the poetic field what it lacks most,—the gift of the elemental touch. Few will deny that, with all its other excellences, the poetry of the generation needs just this touch to make it more vitally human and more spontaneously effective.

ALAIN LOCKE.

Washington, D. C.



THE CYCLE







I CLOSED MY SHUTTERS FAST LAST  
NIGHT

I closed my shutters fast last night,  
Reluctantly and slow,  
So pleading was the purple sky  
With all the lights hung low;  
I left my lagging heart outside  
Within the dark alone,  
I heard it singing through the gloom  
A wordless, anguished tone.  
Upon my sleepless couch I lay  
Until the tranquil morn  
Came through the silver silences  
To bring my heart forlorn,  
Restoring it with calm caress  
Unto its sheltered bower,  
While whispering: "Await, await  
Your golden, perfect hour."

## FOOTSTEPS

Passing ever, early, late,  
No fond footsteps seek my gate,  
But down the winding road they wend  
To some other journey's end.

Yet,—I would not have them wait  
Here within my guarded gate,  
Certain footsteps I shall know,  
And for them I listen low!

## OH NIGHT OF LOVE

Oh night of love, your rapt ecstatic hours  
Were mine, the languor of their pale perfume  
Pervades me, kisses in a fountain-fire,  
Surround me,—fetter and consume.

Oh night of love, your groves of strange content  
Project a thralldom over coming days;  
Exalted, derelict, and blind I wend  
Unmindfully along Life's misty ways.



## AUTUMN

Believe me—when I say  
That love like yours, at this belated hour,  
Overwhelms me,—  
Stills the fount of thought!  
I move as one new-born—  
And strange to swift transitions  
As from my prison door  
I gaze  
Into a blinding sunlight!



## THRALLDOM

Your voice keeps ringing down the day  
In accents soft and mild,  
With which you have beguiled  
And wooed me as a child.

Your presence bounds my every way  
And thrills me in its fold  
With phantom hands that hold  
Like cherished chains of gold.

## SEPARATION

Within your pulsing day  
There must be little space  
For visions of my face  
To lure your thoughts away.

Yet, I would have it so,  
To bear alone the pain  
That saddens love's refrain.  
Pray God you never know!

## LOVE'S MIRACLE

So like a boundless, soundless sea  
The miracle of love to me,  
With all the world a rosy dream  
Sailing upon a silver stream,  
While I, a fairy in mid-air,  
Am dancing, dancing everywhere.

Hark! do you hear the thunder peal?  
I care not what it would reveal,  
Tomorrow will be yesterday  
When I am shivering and gray:

I will not heed the prompter's ring  
Let others answer, I shall sing  
And dance the merrier—away!  
I'll live and live and live—today!



## PROVING

Were you a leper bathed in wounds  
And by the world denied,  
I'd share your fatal exile  
As a privilege, with pride.

You are the very sun, the moon,  
The starlight of my soul,  
The sounding motif of my heart  
Its impetus and goal!



## INTERIM

The days lie dark between our jeweled meetings  
Like wintry burials.

My heart bows low before the cheerless hearth  
Until your voice rings through the gloom  
And bids me  
Wake!  
And live!

## GOOD-BYE

Let's say "Good-bye"  
Nor wait Love's latest breath  
Poised now so lightly on the wing of Death,  
While yet within our eyes one fervent gleam  
Remains to hallow this, a passing dream:  
Yes, yes "Good-bye,"  
For it is best to part  
While Love's low light still burns  
Within the heart!

## A PARADOX

I know you love me better cold  
Strange as the pyramids of old  
Responselessly.

But I am frail, and spent and weak  
With surging torrents that bespeak  
A living fire.

So, like a veil, my poor disguise  
Is draped to save me from your eyes'  
Deep challenges.

Fain would I fling this robe aside  
And from you, in your bosom hide  
Eternally.

Alas! you love me better cold  
Like frozen pyramids of old  
Unyieldingly?



## HOW MY HEART SINKS

How my heart sinks when I behold the sad reflection of my face,  
A wan and wistful wound, with oh, such meagre grace;  
How can you hold me dear withal and conjure charms withdrawn.  
Or does the Autumn twilight hold a charm unknown to dawn?

Hold! Do not speak! some day perchance, I'll read the message dire  
Within the ashes of the flame, the aftermath of fire,  
Ere then perhaps I shall have found the highways of the soul  
Where one may read uncrucified, the blood-words of the scroll.  
Till then, uphold illusion's veil before my gaze the while  
That I may gather strength to fuse from agony, a smile!



## TO TIME

Day by day the threads of white  
Multiply, Oh! hour-glass!  
How passing swift your bright sands pass,  
Fain would I hold you,  
Linger, bide  
Until these surges shall subside,  
That sweep me forward unto bliss,  
Oh! charging sun, I bid you rest,  
Break not your arrow in my breast!

WELT

Would I might mend the fabric of my youth  
Which daily flaunts its tatters to my eyes,  
Would I might compromise awhile with truth  
Until love's moon, now waxing, wanes and dies.

For I would go a further while with you  
And drain this Cup of Joy so passing fair,  
Which meets my parching lips like cooling dew  
'Ere time has brushed cold fingers through my  
hair.

## REVIEW

I fear my power impotent  
To hold you leal and full content,  
Some hapless look or word perchance  
Dispels the glamour of romance;  
I tremble lest some stranger fair  
Arrest you,—cause you to compare  
The meagre charms which I possess  
With some resplendent loveliness.

How far removed from Youth's command  
The trembling sceptre in my hand,  
As miserly within the glass  
I mark Love's fleeting hours pass.



## ILLUSION

Oh! for the veils of my far-away youth,  
Shielding my heart from the blaze of the truth;  
Why did I stray from their foldings and grow  
Into the sadness that follows—to know.

Impotent atom with desolate gaze  
Treading Life's treacherous, intricate maze—  
Oh for the veils, for the veils of my youth,  
Shielding my heart from the blaze of the truth!

## PARODY

You came,  
The tapestries of love  
Were shining in the sun,  
My wishes settled down content  
About you as you stood.  
I looked into your cryptic eyes  
And thought I understood;  
But no,—  
The splendor of your gaudy robe  
Grew dimmer day by day,  
I wondered,  
Searched within my soul to seize the mystery.  
The answer staggered me,  
Aghast,  
Like one at bay,  
I gazed with open eyes of thought upon you,  
God! 'twas true—  
A mockery, a parody,  
Had come to me—in you!

## DELUSION

You gave me your hand,  
I held it to be  
The last word, the dear word,  
The soul's entity;  
I cherished it, treasured it,  
Only to find  
I held but a gauntlet—  
That I had been blind!



## SUNSET

And now—

As one who closes up the house and goes uncaring  
where

He may forget the scenes of home 'mid foreign  
climes and air,

I bar the chamber of my heart and seal the past  
within

To wander down the city's road amid the whirr  
and din.

The long years seem impassable, the morning has  
no smile,

With naught behind these barring doors and  
nothing else worth while,

Like some lone pilgrim without hope, I stumble  
on my way,

Who lifts no futile plea for sun, but asks for  
clouds less grey.

## FINIS

I looked death calmly in the face  
And placed my hand within his hand  
And said:

"Come, come, let us away  
For I have lost the magic key  
Opening the portals of desire—  
My wishes cumber in the dust,  
And life is stagnant

in

my

heart!

## CONTEMPLATION





## IVY

I am a woman  
Which means  
I am insufficient  
I need—  
Something to hold me  
Or perhaps uphold.  
I am a woman.

## JOY

There's nothing certain, nothing sure  
Save sorrow. Fragile happiness  
Was never fashioned to endure;  
For joy repels the perfect claim  
And answers to no certain name;  
How furtively we scan the mist  
Perchance amid the gloom to find  
Some moments rare and rapture-kist



## ONE DAY

Good-bye dear day of sunshine, rain  
In flooding torrents pours  
Its liquid footsteps on my roof,  
Its fingers on my doors.

While I sit tranquilly within  
And tell my beads of joy,  
Holding a peace within my heart  
Which nothing can destroy.

## ATTAR

Fire—tears—  
And the torture-chamber,  
With the last maddening turn of the screw—  
Only thus  
Is one precious drop distilled  
Of the attar of rose  
Of the heart.

## YOUTH'S PROGENY

Oh the sad little dreams of the dim yesteryear  
Lying cold, still and stark in the dust of their  
    bier,  
How the heart hurries back, all the long weary  
    way,  
Just to bid them good-night at the close of the  
    day.



## I WONDER

I wonder—

as I see them pass unheeded down the way,  
(The women who were once beloved, imperious  
and gay)

Holding with frail, pale hands the cup

Of Life's discarded wine

If memories

Are bliss enough

To make the dregs—divine!

## VALUES

All the pretty baubles spread  
Are not the answer to my need,  
These tinsel'd trappings but beguile  
This journeying, while deep within  
A want unspeakable resides,  
That throbs and throbs unceasingly,—  
So hungering,—no banquet spread  
Can tempt it, and no golden wine  
Make it forget: I balance it—  
The world flies upward in the scale!  
Always, unsoothed, unquieted,  
It aches and aches across the days  
And sears the nights that sum my life.

## ARMAGEDDON

In the silence and the dark  
I fought with dragons;  
I was battered, beaten sore  
But rose again;  
On my knees I fought still rising  
In my pain:  
In the dark I fought with dragons.  
Weary tears  
Cease your flowing,  
Even now the dawn appears!



LE SOIR

Mute-lipped—

                    unquestioning grim-visaged Fate,  
I cleave the shadows toward the Western Gate;  
And yet—

                    my lagging heart still holds  
Mute-arms outstretched  
Unto earth's gleaming folds.

Who knows?

                    perhaps Hope's blossoms spray  
In lush profusion  
O'er the edge of day!

## TREASURE

What matters though love's dream shall pass,  
Since from the throbbing hour-glass  
One golden-throated moment prest  
Its attared incense to my breast.

Since I have known the purple gleam  
That lifts above me—can I deem  
The way unlighted—when I go  
Encircled by love's afterglow?

## RETROSPECTION

After all—

                    mine is the joy  
Which naught can lessen or destroy.  
For love has led my flying feet  
Where immortelles are springing sweet,  
And everlasting skies of gold  
Are memories, when earth is cold  
And though our future paths should lie  
Estranged, as star-ways, through the sky,  
I shall not look reproof, nor find  
Within this pass a charge unkind,  
And lightly sorrow shall be met  
For I can never know regret.





## INTERMEZZI





## SPRINGTIME

Again it is the vibrant May,  
The bursting buds, the leafing trees,  
The fragrant, undulating breeze,  
Call to my heart in subtlest way:  
Come! Come! it is a holiday.

The streamlet with unending song,  
Beneath its silver veil of mist  
Seems flowing, flowing, to some tryst,  
While I—with inner surges strong,  
Find incomplete the day, and long.

## DESTINY

I know my love is seeking me  
As restless rivers seek the sea,  
Across the nights, across the days  
That snare the intervening ways.

I know my love is seeking me  
As Time must seek Eternity,  
When nights are very still I hear  
His footsteps, coming, coming near!

## ENVOYS

Love calls me tonight  
In the beat of the rain  
Through the cold little drops  
On my bare window-pane;  
Calls and calls through the dark  
Like a whispered refrain  
Tapping soft on my heart  
Through the bare window pane.



I WANT TO DIE WHILE YOU LOVE ME

I want to die while you love me,  
While yet you hold me fair,  
While laughter lies upon my lips  
And lights are in my hair.

I want to die while you love me  
And bear to that still bed  
Your kisses—turbulent, unspent,  
To warm me when I'm dead.

I want to die while you love me  
Oh, who would care to live,  
'Til love has nothing more to ask  
And nothing more to give.

## ECSTASY

Not less than this, beloved,  
This beaming, highmost ray  
That sweeps in royal splendor  
Across our perfect day.

Not less than this,—far rather  
That we should say “adieu,”  
With every rose in Eden  
Abloom for me and you.

## PLEDGE

With kisses I'll awake you love  
So tenderly at morn,  
The pledges of my fealty  
Diurnally reborn.

We'll thread life's way together love,  
And when the fading light  
Dips softly over western hills  
I'll kiss your eyes good-night.



## YOUR EYES

Your eyes—

Dark pools, so calm and deep,  
A thousand ages in them sleep,  
A dreaming world within them lies,  
And all my hopes  
Of paradise!

## AMOUR

Kiss me!

And let the hours bloom triumphantly  
Before life's little sun has set  
And I am old.

Love me!

The day is fleet  
And I . . .  
Am far too passionate  
To die!

## FINALITY

When love's triumphant day is done,  
Go forward! leave me to the night  
Beneath the coldly staring stars,  
The waiting winter and its blight.

For I would never hold the heart  
That mutely quivers to be free,  
Unfurl your restless wings—away!  
And leave the emptiness to me.



## IN LOVE

I lived in Hell the other day  
Its fires wrapt me angrily,  
But now their horrors fall and fade  
Like ghosts that memory has made.

I lived in Hell even today,  
How swift the fierce flames die away—  
Submerged with kisses, I forget,  
With tears upon my pillows yet.

## FICTION

Ah! love!

I shall not seek to penetrate

Your webbed gauze

Nor tease my heart

By queries deep,

But hold you tenderly;

The day is evening,

And I must cull my flowers

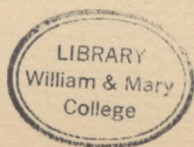
'Ere dark.

DEAD DAYS

Dead days of rapture and despair  
I would your hours exhume,  
Renew their wildness once again  
Their rigors and perfume.



PENSEROSO





BREAK, BREAK MY HEART

Break, break my heart  
For love is done,  
The pale light trails the dying sun—  
And night awaits—no hope—no stars  
Darkness  
Hide my scars!



## LITTLE KING

From worshipping I now arise  
Stunned and aghast, with open eyes  
I see the real, the little you  
I thought so gallant, brave and true.

A pity yet is mine, I fear,  
Since wherefore comes this falling tear,  
For none among your fawning throng  
Will love you well, nor love you long.

## ROMANCE

When I was young

I used to say:

Romance *will come* riding by

And I shall surely smile

And play with him awhile.

When I grew older

then I said:

Romance *may come* riding by

I wonder shall I smile

And play with him awhile?

But now—

Alas! I only say:

Romance *never will* come by

And I shall never smile

He has been dead the while!

## FALLING GODS

Confusion, desuetude and gloom,  
The travailing of sound,  
Fell desolation in my soul,  
And agony profound;  
The gods are falling heavily  
And for all time to be,  
And never more my heart shall know  
A shrine to Deity!



## ARMOR

You cannot hurt me any more  
For I am armored now  
And I can look into your face  
With cool, unfevered brow.

The tranquil river meets the sea,  
My life flows on at rest,  
Unurged, untorn, but oh, my God!  
I love the old way best!

## DIVIDE

Your lightest breath may fan my cheek  
Your whisper stir me when you speak,  
And yet—  
The teeming planets play  
Between your heart—and mine  
Today.

## RETURN

Now,  
Like the pines intoning  
Though some solitary gloom,  
My errant thoughts go pattering  
About love's ancient tomb,  
And though no breath of incense rare  
Lies round the shattered cup,  
A banquet weird, the fragments  
Where the ghost of love  
May sup.



## SONG OF THE SINNER

Just a bit of ashes  
Grey, grey ashes—spent—  
God! how fierce the fires burned  
Down to this content.

Just a bit of ashes,  
Not a single spark  
Lives in this residuum  
Crumbling cold and dark.

Just a bit of ashes—  
To the judgment day,  
I go with my memories—  
Pray, sweet virgin, pray!

## CELIBACY

Where is the love that might have been  
Flung to the four far ends of Earth?  
In my body stamping around,  
In my body like a hound  
Leashed and restless—  
Biding time!





## CADENCE



## OFFERING

I seek no token of you dear  
I only ask to give  
The purple flower of my heart  
And you will let it live.

I ask no fealty or plight,  
I only pray that you  
May find earth's barren places bright  
Perhaps, because it grew.

And when for you the final sun  
Moves toward the darkening West,  
I shall be lingering to place  
Love's flower on your breast.



## ESTRANGEMENT

Some day I shall be dead, and pride  
Which kept me from your feet,  
Shall be the burden of the song  
My cold lips shall repeat.

And some day when you too shall find  
A pillow in the sod,  
Would you then spurn an hour with me  
Above—where daisies nod?

## RECESSIONAL

Consider me a memory—a dream  
That passed away,  
Or yet, a flower that has blown and shattered—  
In a day;  
For passion sleeps, alas, and keeps no vigil  
With the years,  
And wakens to no conjuring  
Of orison or tears.

Consider me a melody  
That served its simple turn,  
Or but the residue of fire  
That settles in the urn,  
For love defies pure reasoning  
And undeterred flows  
Within—without  
The vassal heart!  
Its reasoning—  
Who knows?

## SEPULCHRE

I have mounded the corpse of my sorrow  
And wreathed it with roses fair  
That none who may pass on the morrow  
May know what lies buried there.



## CURTAIN

When one has lived  
'Tis not so hard  
To fold the hands,  
To say, "Good-night,"  
And creep away  
Behind the dark;  
But 'tis not strange  
The heart rebels  
When sounds of night  
Ring down the day  
That was a weary, joyless way  
From early dawn  
To setting sun:  
How eagerly we trail the light  
For crumbs of happiness we fend,  
And struggle, struggle—to the end!

## AFTERGLOW

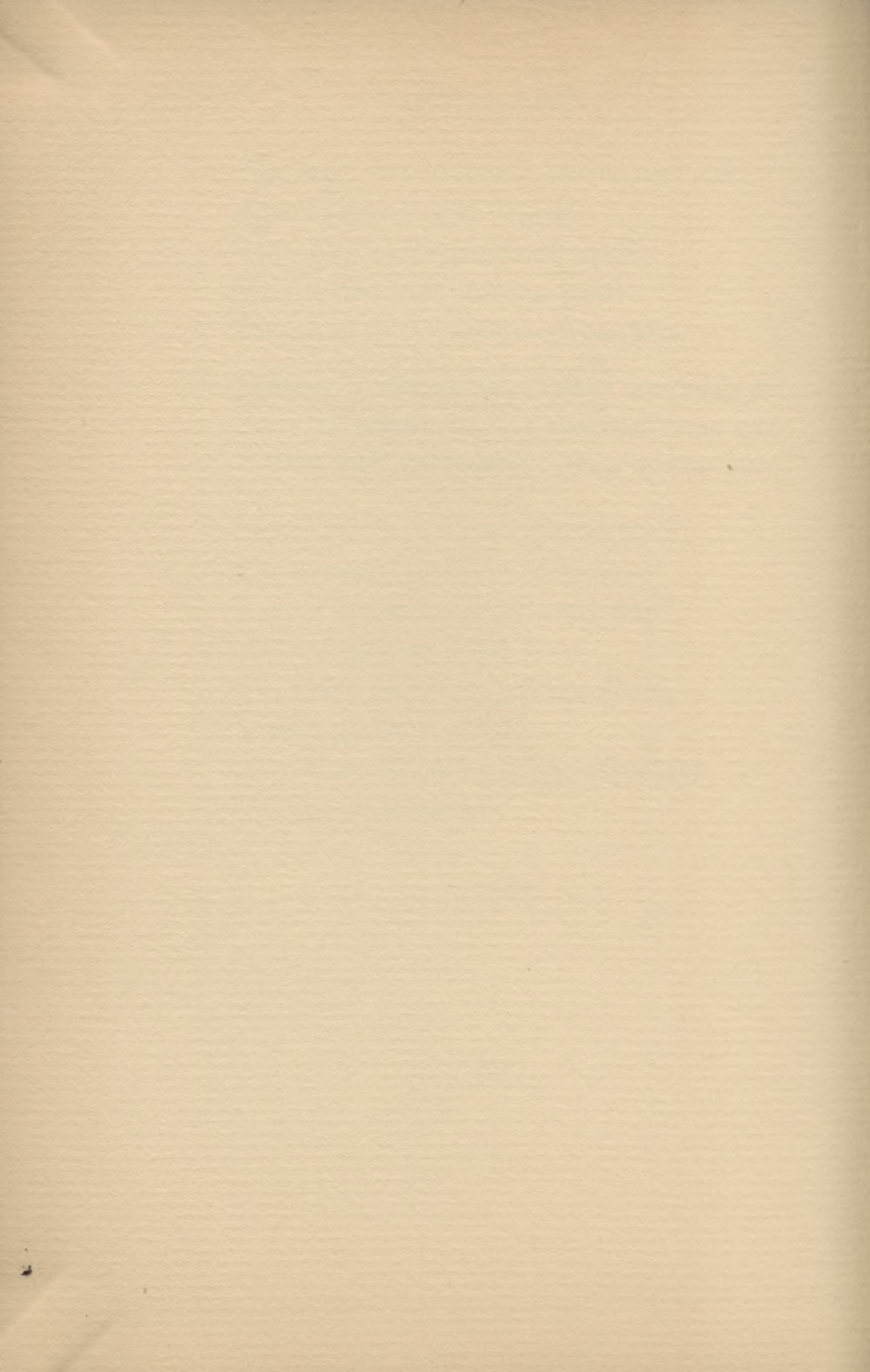
Through you I entered heaven and hell,  
Knew rapture and despair,  
I flitted o'er the plains of earth  
And scaled each shining stair:  
Drank deep the waters of content,  
And drained the cup of gall,  
Was regal and was impotent,  
Was suzerain and thrall.

Now, by Reflection's placid pool  
On evening's mellowed brow,  
I smile across the backward way  
And pledge anew my vow;  
For every glancing, golden gleam,  
I offer gladly—pain!  
And I would give a thousand world  
To live it all again!

FINIS

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